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Imprints, Vol. 2

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Imprints

Volume II

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Imprints is the official publication for Sigma Tau Delta, the honorary English fraternity. The editors welcome creative works submitted by contributors and also publish winners of the annual T.E. Ferguson Writing Contest. Especially welcome are poems, fiction pieces and essays of no more than 5,000 words in length. At this time we would like to express our gratitude to David Whitescarver, Sigma Tau Delta faculty advisor, for his unrelenting optimism and valuable help in the preparation of this journal.

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IMPRINTS

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Stephen F. Austin State University

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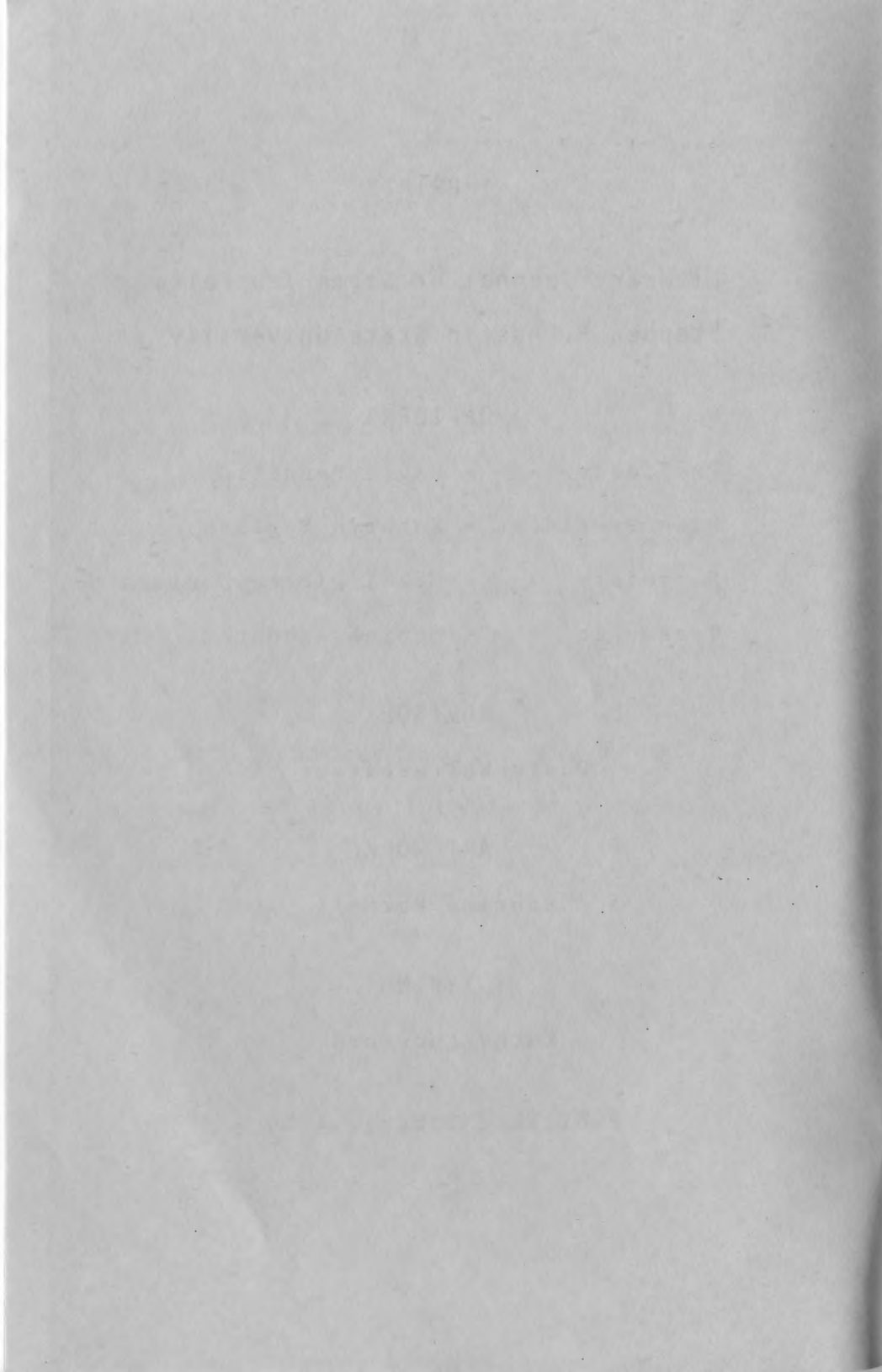


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APRIL DANCER

You are the warmth of a blanket
on a cold winter's night.

You are Christmas.

You are a patchwork of pieces
of paper giftwrap around an old box.

You are cool green-grey grass
and trees under a full moon.

You are an ephemeral winged creature
that appears in my dreams:

when I reach out to touch you,
you go aloft and hide in the stars.

You are a dolphin, a child of the deep.

You are a voyager, a Valkyrie,
the voice of a child

disguised in the body of a woman.

You are eyelashes, painted lips and toenails.

You are my fear, my delight.

You are blue faraway lights

bobbing on the surface of a smooth lake
on a warm summer night

when I am skinny-dipping.

You are the warm water caressing me.

You are the night ...

you are jet black.

You are the fool that resides in me,
the compulsion which steals my judgment,
the force which muddles my thinking.

You are all the women I have ever known;
elusive, graceful.

You are the coldness of an open window,
the tread of alien steps upon a stairway.

You are the end of all things,
the beginning of dreams,
the sobering reality,
the pain of growth.

You are the unknown;

you are life after death.

You are the memory,
the future,
the hope,
the mystery of life;
the cycle,
the cause without reason,
the smell of smoke.
You are the frustration,
the uncertainty;
you are Pandora's Box.
You are me
and you are not.

by JERRY D. FITZGERALD

Cages of Defeat

Rows and rows of endless cages were all that one
could see.

These cages held

innocent pups,
gray, old dogs with sad, tired eyes...
spunky kittens,
cats weary with age.

In one corner,

set aside,

a cage was placed.

From a ball of

sleeping creatures,
a kitten,
purring contently,
was quickly lifted out and the cage door shut.
Still purring,

it was placed upon a table and tightly strapped down.
An assuring hand gently brushed over the animal's
soft,

champagne-colored fur,
while the other hand silently injected the
fatal shot.

The kitten moved only once--

to lick the hand
with its
rough, little tongue;
then quietly it laid down its head...
It purred no more.

Rows and rows of endless cages were all that one
could see.

by KIM SHAFFER

One Destructive World

One hot night
One enchanted woman
One ecstatic man
One magnificent circle
One illustrious line
One specific journey
One exhilarating union
One miracle.

One desperate moment
One petrified girl
One mindless doctor
One cold blade
One calculating slice
One bloody heap
One salty tear
One resolution.

One destructive world.

by JILL HUBER

Blocked

Stale. Static. Stagnant.
A black hole covers the mind's eye.

Nothing comes.

Is this the first stage of madness?
No, you've done that.
You're ready for the moveable feast.

The old man with the brickled beard
Watches Paris disappear behind his eyes and
Remembers the peasants,
 the bullfights,
 the warm red wine,
 the islands in the stream.
Remembers . . . but tells no one.

July 2, 1961.
It's morning.
The liquor's worn off.
The mountain's flat and barren.
The light's dirty and dim.

Nothing to do but push the block.
Nothing to do but pull the trigger.

Ah, to feel the words again.

by TERRY H. SCOTT

THE BROTHER'S KEEPER

Mother's elite Mexican friends called her "progressive" -- a condition not far removed from "subversive" or "Communist."

"Why do you thank the maids for their service?" Mrs. Suarez de Mir would ask over cafe au lait and pan dulce. "Surely it's enough that you say 'Please'."

They're human beings, Mother would reply. I'm a Connecticut Congregationalist and an Adlai Stevenson Democrat -- we treat people like human beings. I'm an employer, not a slaveowner.

"Why do you pay them so much" -- this from Mrs. de Cordoba, who spent her afternoons at the beauty parlor in the Palacio de Hierros and evenings at Los Pinos with the First Lady. "They just squander the extra pesos at the Alameda or looking for men on Garibaldi Square."

They're entitled to more money, Mother said, and I'm teaching them about savings and spending wisely. I'm considering starting a credit union... And you know about my school. I give them extra money for attending in the afternoons.

They're spoiled, was the verdict. And from Mrs. Reyes: "They don't stay with you. They leave. I've had Soledad for five years. Your last girl lasted five months. They don't care for equality. They like the system as it is."

But I want them to leave, Mother said. I want them to leave and move forward. But while they're here, by God, they're going to learn to read and write, to save money and get good work habits. Then they can get a job at the factory.

(Which factory Mother never specified, nor dared we inquire for she was not to be opposed with impunity...)

What I'm doing here, Mother would conclude, is making people better -- the maids, chauffeurs, gardeners and shoe shine boys of Mexico. I'm giving

them opportunities and in my own little way, removing the lure of Communism in a peaceful, helpful manner. Bring people up, don't keep them down. That's insurance against Communism.

Such was my mother's foreign policy position circa 1969.

I was Mother's spy, emissary, adviser and schoolteacher. We lived in a rather stately conservador style mansion in Polanco, formerly owned by a Spanish family with not-so-secret Falangist connections.

The house had a Franquista look to it -- dark, severe (a bourgeois cleric's haven), stucco and volcanic stone mixed with what appeared to be concrete and fake panelling. It was decorated incongruously in an Early American style, with light and simple pieces that looked bruised and crushed by the harsh totalitarian features of the house.

The high white stucco walls were studded along the edges with broken colored glass that in the fury of tungsten street lights, blazed a gaudy pattern of crimsons, absinthes and mustard yellows. (They'd been put there by the Falangists to keep cat burglars away. Legend has it that many a foolish squatter could be heard howling from a deep, mean cut.) A group of stark, dessicated hardwoods and dying, never-flowering jacarandas formed a compelling circle around the mansion, bending closer year after year -- perhaps toward the stingy sprinkler system -- as if jealously engulfing the ugly place.

After school, I spent the afternoons with homework and Mother's "brother's keeper" projects. Sometimes I'd raise funds for the Shoes for Orphans campaign (Mother: if the poorest child in the city of Leon, Guanajuato owns a pair of sturdy shoes, then the same should be done for them here). On other occasions, I sold Girl Guide cookies (at that time

there were no Girl Scouts) and helped sell raffle tickets on behalf of the deaf. Or the blind. Or the handicapped. Nevertheless, I was not allowed to give limozna - handouts - to beggars, even if they were deaf, blind, handicapped or retarded. Don't, Mother said, don't ever give alms. It's bad for their character.

Surely, Mother, I would say, that retarded boy outside Sumesa supermarket is starving and in need of help now...

It's bad for his moral development, Mother said. The argument was settled, in her favor.

Other assignments were not so harmless. I was often sent to the servants' quarters, under guise of wanting to chat or to play, to look for stolen silverware, expensive chocolates missing from the sweet box and most importantly, for "funny-smelling cigarettes." Marijuana. Spy, emissary, adviser, schoolteacher. Narcotics agent.

Mother's school was not compulsory. But if one did not attend, raises and special days off were hard to come by and one always sensed her diminished respect, her "disappointment" which, far more wrenching than her anger, left one feeling empty, or better said, vacated. Even nonexistent.

So, to "school" they went. Gardeners, chauffeurs and family, maids, cooks, the laundry woman, the ironing woman. Mother even recruited the tortilla seller's two children and a shoeshine boy who stole my play tea set and several pencils over a period of time.

No one took it seriously. My only small miracle was Jose Luis, the gardener's retarded son, who loved to form big, elaborately decorated letters and to add and to multiply. Subtraction, though, made him weep. Each "take away" was a small death. Saul the principal gardener and Hector the chauffeur already read and wrote but attended in order to further their financial schemes. Mother promised to help Hector build a new house -- and then

found out he took the money for his thirteen-year-old mistress. Saul, honest and earnest, received money to get a toilet in his house and a down payment on a 1957 Volvo.

The rest, especially maids and cooks, came and went. The City girls sat together. They were more sophisticated, they smoked and spoke out of turn. The country girls sat huddled together in the child-size furniture of my vulgar Valentine-pink-and-lace room, brushing out their waist-length hair or braiding it, eyes untroubled and unfocused. Humble, obsequious and unmotivated, there was none among them I could take, as one would a bride, from the valley of superstition and subservience, to the peaks of Learning and Science.

No one did homework assignments -- Marchantita, I was told, I'm sick, or Senorita, look at all the work the Patrona gives. Yesterday we had to do the silver...

Only the ever-smiling Jose Luis did what he was told. And the City girls called him "Tonto" for doing so.

About the time Marisol arrived at our doorstep from Tlaxcala, I was on the letter V. No one would draw it for me on the blackboard. Devil's horns, one country maid said. I've seen it on a wall downtown on Madero, another said. They say it's a Communist symbol.

When all was said and done, what I would take away from this makeshift school was the bitterness my pupils felt. The ironing woman especially resented Mother's attempts to "get inside my head. My body is not free, but I wish the Patrona would leave my spirit alone."

Yes, Hector would lament, they try to change your insides. My outsides are sick, poor and unhealthy enough. I say: leave my insides alone.

One could say I was a double agent, then. On the one hand, I went off to check the rooms for stolen Carlos Quinto chocolates, storyboard novelas

of violence and love (Mother thought them too vulgar) and subversive cigarettes; I taught staff to read and write, and mildly (condescendingly) scolded them. Yet, on the other, I sat among them at staff lunches and after dinner, listening to their complaints and to the stories of the lives, hovering but distant, empathetic but unhappily bound to my parents' naive and disgraceful hypocrisy.

Through the staff, I knew where I was. I was on the fringe of their benevolently guided oppression - a go-between at once equally offended by Mother's foreign charity (and values) and offensively tied to her by blood. Through my parents I knew who I was. A child of American parents raised in Mexico, a criollo-Anglo version. I could understand Mexico and therefore could never be trusted completely, but I was trained as a problem solver and a brother's keeper and could no more be at home among the staff than among my peers at the prep school in Lomas de Chapultepec.

Mother's school was bound to come to an end. It was a "bittersweet failure" my father the advertising agency owner later said. We tried, he would say, we did what we could to make them better. But they refuse to conform to reality, and Father would then attribute this incorrigibility to some great and everlasting ethnocultural retardation, all the while spending his professional time preparing slogans like: "Buy Bon Ami, because Bon Ami is your cleaning friend" for television and print.

All it took to wreck the school was the truth. That is, a certain version of the truth, which when discredited or suppressed over a long period of time, tends, like the molten viscera of a volcano, to "surface" from time to time with little warning or provocation.

Her name was Marisol. Maria del Sol, if one breaks it up into its contradictory parts. The

Mother's face had gone white; perhaps it reflected the light of a cloudy half-moon. "Any factory. Any factory you might go to." With exhaustion or resignation. "What I mean is, factories in general."

"Oh," said Marisol, braiding, "all factories, you mean."

If Marisol rebelled against daily time, she was even less willing to adapt to what, for lack of a better term, I will call chronological time.

Evidence of this: one day Hector was complaining at lunch about a painful sty.

"I know something that will help," Marisol said. She cleared away some bowls of angel's hair soup and frijoles and then went across the street to the alley where a squatter and his children had set up shelter under a tin and cardboard roof. She picked up and cradled their sickly, three-legged cat, whose missing back leg was said to have been "filler" in lukewarm caldo of water and salt one desperate night when the squatter was unemployed and without a garden.

She carried the unlucky creature back to the house and into the kitchen. She placed its mangy, hairless tail over the swollen sty, said something several times in Nahuatl, and then declared Hector to be cured.

Two City maids who were smoking and teasing their spray-turgid bouffantes, laughed and called it silliness.

"I learned this from a cura," Marisol said. Her eyes were like burnt vegetation, half smoldering, half molten-black. "He is the best cura in the world."

"We'll see how cured Hector is," I said. "And just how effective your curandero is. I give the cure an hour."

An hour passed. Hector was talking to the tamarindo seller and her boy out front by the cars. The sty was still swollen.

Marisol laughed when I told her the curandero has been a fake.

"First," she said, "there is no harm if Hector is not dead." "Second. It will go away, eventually. But we can't say when. Only God. God sees the cure, hears the incantations in my heart, and knows I believe in his power through the cure. That's the way it works. Not with numbers on clocks."

"Eventually" the stye did go away. It was but a memory or better said, an argument whose point had since lost validity or purpose. Chronology was not the issue. I watched her in the laundry room washing our clothes with a volcanic stone. I knew that I should stop her.

But the point was, I didn't. Man-made time and God's time. And there she stood, rubbing the Dacron, the acrylics and the rayon as though trying to stimulate life beneath the deathless, flat surfaces.

She horrified Mother with her ideas about medicine and her outrageous concoctions.

"What's this?" Mother lifted the lid off a pan one afternoon before supper.

"Medicine for stomach holes," Marisol said. "Concha has several. And I, for living in the Distrito, have two."

Mother thought a bit. "Ulcers," she said. "They're called ulcers."

"They're stomach holes," Marisol said evenly, "made by demons in the night when one sleeps." "Some of those demons," she went on to say, mixing the broth, "came with the gringos."

"What's in this?" I asked her later. She was sipping from the broth with a spoon.

"It's made from blood."

"The base is blood," I repeated, as if I hadn't heard correctly.

And for the first time, Marisol smiled. It was almost lewd, carnal lips thrust forward in the effort.

Let's put it this way, she said. It's not human blood.

At last, the disintegration of Mother's dream-school...

Marisol joined us in the afternoons after Mother had bribed her with a ten peso a week raise.

I watched as she took her seat in the front (where no one but Jose Luis willingly sat), opened a "cuaderno" to the first clean page and looked at me with an ugly, hostile stare.

We were discussing geography that afternoon. How well I remember her hair, which was down, and coarse and lovely like mohair in the soft light, spoiled here and there by streaks of auburn.

We spoke of Christopher Columbus. And the world as a sphere, round and not flat as had been previously assumed.

At the end of class, Marisol came forward. As usual there had been no questions, no interest, no homework assignments turned in. I was surprised to see Marisol standing there before me, insolently out of uniform (Mother insisted that they wear them to school) and stroking her hair seductively.

"How do you know the world is round?" she asked. "How do you know that it is not flat?"

I explained the Columbus story again, drew diagrams based on his voyage.

She would not budge.

"I'll bring something here tomorrow which will prove my point beyond all your doubts," I said.

I borrowed the academy's globe and brought it to class for Marisol to see.

I showed her how if you travelled in a circle around the globe you would get back to your point of origin. That in fact, voyages like these had been undertaken hundreds and thousands of times since Magellan.

"This is not the world," Marisol said. "This

is a ball. A pelota with lines and things painted on it. A funny ball."

This is a facsimile of the world I said. A representation of it. People have seen the earth from the moon, seen the world and its spherical shape for themselves.

At night I took her out back to the garden to show her the full moon.

The moonlight made her hair glisten, moist as if bloody. She was drowsy now, almost drunk with the pale, sapless light that barely sustained her. She swayed.

The roses were wet with moonlight too. Everything seemed drunk or wet; everything swayed to the beat of her sway.

Here is the moon, I say. What is its shape?

Round, she said. The moon is round. She is round.

Somewhat intoxicated, too, I held her arm to steady myself. I was feeling strange, warm and cold sensations which engulfed and then withdrew from me in waves of surprise and longing.

The moon is round, spherical. Always, I said. Not always, Marisol said.

They just landed on the moon a week ago. They sent back pictures. You must have seen them in Ovaciones, I said. They've seen the earth from the moon and the moon from the earth.

The moon is not always round, she said. She looked at me. Her eyes were wet tonight, moon drunk really, soaked fungi in that still and misshapen torso-stump.

Sometimes, she said, it is a sliver, like a piece of glass under the skin, sometime it's half an apple, sometimes a speck, sometimes it goes away and leaves me alone.

Don't you want to know the true shape of the world? I asked her. Don't you want to know the truth?

I'm not going anywhere, she said. I don't care

about shapes of things which don't concern me. I only care about the shapes I see. There's Father, then Mother the Moon who does not feed me but keeps me awake in her fullness. That's it. I don't care about the shape of the world. But I know that the shape of the moon keeps changing.

The next day in class, Marisol came up to the front, and stood before her colleagues, arms crossed, eyes afire. I quivered and withdrew.

"This," she said of the globe, "is a lie. The world is flat, the world is round, I don't care. The world is flat, the world is round, I don't care. The world is flat, the world is round, I don't care..." on and on, as though she were reciting, in that lethal monotone, a demonic nahuatl incantation. On and on, until the others (even Jose Luis) joined in, enchanted beyond restraint.

.The world is flat, the world is round, I don't care...

I was sick for months. The sun as a man, the Son of God. Plaster Virgen Guadalupe showering pilgrims with blood from their bulging breasts. All my learning disintegrated before me, giant V's turned pulpy red with flame and blood. I mistook the moonlight on the bedpost for dangling flesh.

The maids thought I was possessed. My parents sent me to a psychoanalyst on Londres but I said nothing to him.

All was delirium and chaos and in the center of a whirling vortex of figures, shapes, equations and facts was a thirteen year old child of Americans raised in Mexico, who no longer knew what to believe and could not hold on to anything except an aging mattress, or Mother's small, clammy hand when she could bring herself to see me and witness my "destabilization," as she called it years later.

One day, I ceased to believe in anything. The chaos became nothing. All was gray and diminished.

There were no colors, shapes, no purpose. No numbers, no clocks, no gods, no incantations.

I ate and sat, refused to attend school. My parents left me alone at last, even abandoned the idea of sending me to the States - Father's business was not prospering and a devaluation was anticipated.

I sat, vacated, without purpose and sense of time or destiny day after day. Until I was fifteen.

A little shoeshine boy came to the house and asked for me by name. He told the maids that he'd heard long ago that I used to have a "school." He told them he had some "important" questions to ask me regarding mathematics. Would I please spare a moment to see him?

He was brought to me. I was in the living room. He was wearing a school uniform but from its condition, I could see he'd not been enrolled for a long time.

He was small, rather pale, with red hair and bloody gums. He was very serious but given to impulsive smiles.

He sat before me. He told me his name. Agustin, he said it was, after Agustin Lara. His mother, he said, had "gone with men" for a living but some men had set fire to her and "she was ashes." He wanted to know why when one multiplied all numbers by 0 one always got 0.

The shape of 0 formed in my head, the first shape in years to have filled that empty, shattered space. I thought of the 0 then as flat. Round. Completely round.

Pick a number, Agustin, I said. Pick any number. Five, he said.

Too hard, I said.

Three, he said.

Good, I said. Three. Three written, three in symbol form. Each version of "three" took its place beside the flat, round zero.

Three is the Trinity, the boy said. I like three best.

Yes, I said, as if sensing for the first time blood coursing through my veins. Yes, and Neptune's trident. Now the symbols and images began to accumulate. Three prongs, a man's bearded face, a dove. But at the center, the disturbing nullifier - the flat, round zero.

Three goddesses and the apple, I said. Three women, I said to Agustin, animated and at the edge of my seat. Do you see them?

No, he said. But I see the apple. I'm hungry. So I see the apple.

He reached into his "mochila" and pulled out an apple. It was a sphere. I stared at it hard. A sphere. The zero in my head began to inflate, bulge, turn colors, grow flesh. I watched as Agustin peeled it, the golden skin first. The zero was moist and white inside, darkened here and there with age spots.

And with the sphere died the zero and with the apple died my fear for nothing was absolute and life was not predicated on Truth but on little, knowable truths, which, as time would tell, I learned from scratch with Agustin.

by MELISSA JEANNE MILLER

Imprints



Offering to a Dragon

Pictures of rock; writhing in chains.

I scream and

cannot move or feel more, more of your
love/pain.

The problem is in my back and tensed
smooth neck;

now the chest, and ooh so vibrant,
down my legs.

The problem is all over. It is my
hypochondria --

rampant, and I need a gold, no, a
silverglow cure.

Extremely sensual pulsing, pulsing,
pulsing by --

the eating of flesh for some sacri-
ficial offering.

The virgin maiden - the tainted plastic
whore - who

reaches through the gyrating night
for a more

shocking innocence. Will death deny

my own back

has broken? The creamy thigh has

cracked wide --

I die. I claw and bleed upon the

rock a legacy, of ruined stained and

mortal tears.

by JANA WHITE

WHAT ARE OUR CHILDREN?

Thousands of children are born each day in the United States. What is happening to these children? How do they fit into our society? How we as adults or parents perceive these children and how we place them in our society is my question. Many of these children are born unwanted. They can be found in our numerous orphanages, adoption agencies, abandoned or, as occasionally seen in the headlines of our newspapers, strangled to death, abused, or even burned in ovens. Are these small humans a burden on our society, or are they the hope for our future?

Many parents' lack of understanding and being able to cope with the childhood years causes parents to hurry the child to adolescence. According to David Elkind in The Hurried Child, we dress our small children in faddish clothing, involve them prematurely in competitive sports, and push upon them the norms of adulthood in order to make them grow up faster and be less of a burden on the parent. The problem with this is, what is happening to those formative years before the age of four, the span of a lifetime in which a child gains more knowledge than anytime in his or her life?

With growing numbers of mothers of young children in our working force today, what are we doing with these children? The number to day-care centers and the enrollment in these centers accounts for the whereabouts of these youngsters. They are taken from the important socializing agent of the parent in a classroom setting when only babies. They are subjected to adults' schedules and regimes, to pressures from peer groups, and most importantly to the absence of nurturing for the majority of the day. When returning to the home in the evening, they are welcomed by a perhaps guilty mother, overcompensating for her absence. The natural mother-child relationship is sometimes false and overemphasized or perhaps neglected due to

the fatigue of the parents. The child too adds problems here because he or she has had more to cope with in a day's time than a small child can absorb. The child, being overly exerted, may respond with ill behavior, thus straining the situation more.

Authors of children's literature are often asked "Why do you go to so much trouble just for children?" Are these just children? Are they the same as any litter of unwanted puppies? Are they a problem to us or are they a blessing? If a blessing, why are they treated as such a hindrance? They certainly require more care and understanding than the animal offspring. A child growing up in isolation, as has been cited by psychological and sociological studies, will never develop as a normal human being and even possibly die. Our children begin a socialization process from the moment of birth. The infant perceives attitudes and emotions as a result of interactions with the parent. They only begin to be human and to develop a sense of "I" when their cries and screams bring a response from their parents. They begin to learn about this large mysterious world around them. Who is responsible for their lives, for what is to happen to them as they grow and develop?

My issue is not to deny the fact that many parents love, want and appreciate their children. The voices of these parents are heard everyday as our education system is analyzed, criticized and reformed. However, these voices get weaker as school bonds in various local elections are rejected due to the apparent tax increase. When this decision is presented, who wins, the improvement of classroom accommodations (the child's welfare) or the possibility of higher expenditures?

The Federal Government becomes concerned with our children, as someone needs to do, but mostly when it is a question of comparing our children's intellectual development with that of children in other nations. With the launching of Sputnik I by Russia in 1957, our nation's curriculum was hastily analyzed

and reformed for fear that the children of our nation were behind intellectually compared with those of Russia. Why did the Government worry about our children, rather than our scientists or technologists? Because our children are our future scientists, technologists, teachers, doctors, lawyers and political leaders.

Our small children, however, will never reach the point of having the opportunity to be our future at all if more attention is not afforded them now! They are children in a very large foreboding world, more foreboding each year as time goes by. They will be socialized by their environment whether good or bad. They will be victims of this society, of the values and norms presented to them. Our responsibility to our children, parts of our very own beings, that will be our future, depends on the care given to them. They are not just children. They are our lives now, our lives to come and all the warmth and love that we as adults do not deserve.

There seems to be a compulsive war going on to place a child in the category of "average" or especially "above average." This classification, although affecting the child, does not take the child's feelings into consideration. The norm for adults today is not to have an average child, but an above average child; thus, more pressure on the child. Parents today are installing into the minds of their children that average is not enough. We see this in pressured college students, trying to excel, and ending with suicide or dropping out of school.

Such pressure has become evident on our children to excel, to be better than average, and our children are suffering from the results. Beginning in elementary school in reading groups our children know where they fit into our intellectual society. Whether intended or not, this association can be carried throughout a person's lifetime.

Our world today is divided into social classes. These are measured by different means; status, income, intellect and other measuring devices. Our offspring are born into their classifications and must either live up to them or ignore them completely and venture out to find their own niche in life. If they venture out and do not conform, they are sometimes considered deviant.

According to the conflict theory of sociology, if we never experience conflict with our norms and values, our society will never change and change develops our society. We as a nation or society would never grow if there are no change or deviance in our norms and values.

If parents and teachers today strive for all students to be average and conforming, our world as we know it today would come to a screeching halt. The only advances we have in technology, science, and other fields are made by those that choose to deviate to some degree from the norm.

Our children need a positive cultural force to begin their trek into the unknown world. They need to know the rights and wrongs that were passed on to them from our culture. Taking into account that our culture will change due to numerous factors such as science and technology, they need a foundation on which to base their upcoming behavior in order to maintain our society as we know it. This society, however, is subject to change, and we can only hope that what we have transferred to our offspring will help to establish a meaningful set of norms and for our future society.

Providing that our view of our children can be changed from a simple natural responsibility to a nurturing responsibility, we can begin to see these children as not only objects of our love but as leaders of the societies to come. Selfish humans, as we are, may not worry about the generation to come or the world as it may be when we are gone; but if we do not worry about it, then the new gen-

eration will be totally on its own with no help from us. Our children are our connections with what is to come. Do we care?

by JUDY TROLLINGER

Tolstoy's De-glorification
of
Passion in Anna Karenina

The opening scene of a popular modern movie takes place on a hot, humid day in a small, rather provincial community.¹ Ladies lift their hair off their necks and fan; men open their shirts and mop their brows with their handkerchiefs. The climatic conditions foreshadow the body heat that will be generated when and after the male and female leads meet (one hesitates to call them hero and heroine). When the two meet, they fall instantly in love and in lust, but the young man must overcome the woman's reticence before they can consummate their passion. He quickly accomplishes this feat, and for approximately sixty minutes, the movie audience views one hot, steamy love scene after another. But the two lovers cannot enjoy their bliss indefinitely, for, alas, the lady has a rich and powerful husband who must be killed if the two are to be truly happy. Alive, the husband will forever be an obstacle to their happiness, especially since all the money belongs to him. After much torturous soul-searching, the young male lover accomplishes this feat as well, but happiness eludes him. At the close of the movie, he languishes in prison, charged with the husband's murder, while his lady-love lounges on a luxurious, tropical, whitesands beach, looking longingly and wistfully out over the waters.

The Hollywood-produced story of the eternal triangle is a cheapened and altered version of what Denis De Rougemont calls the myth of "fatal love" (1). He describes this fatal love, which he claims has been exceptionally popular with European writers, as an "idealized eroticism," an afflicting yet elevating passion, and an adulterous passion which takes the form of an "obsession by the love that breaks the law" (1-4). Says De Rougemont, "Romance only comes

into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon[,] and doomed by life itself" (1).

Many have contributed to the development of this passionate love myth that De Rougemont describes. Twelfth-century troubadours extolled its virtues in song.² Andreas Cappellanus furthered the cause by formulating certain principles of conduct for adulterous court lovers. Chretien de Troyes' Lancelot and Guenevere, Dante's Paolo and Francesca, Wagner's Tristan and Isolde are but a few of the many lovers whose stories have perpetuated and glorified the myth. John Stevens states that it "still exists" as "romantic love--the perennial theme of European literature, art, and . . . entertainment, from Lancelot to Anna Karenina . . ." (3). Tolstoy employs passionate love in his powerful novel Anna Karenina, but whereas other writers use it as "a radical condemnation of marriage," he makes it an argument for marriage " (De Rougemont 46). Therefore, although Tolstoy's version of passionate love fits De Rougemont's description of the fatal love myth, Tolstoy actually counters the myth with story twists that de-glorify grand passion and reduce its power to perpetuate the myth.

Tolstoy's triangle consists of prominent government official Alexey Karenin, his society-conscious wife, Anna Karenina, and Anna's lover, dashing and handsome young military officer, Count Alexey Vronsky. The passionate love of Anna and Vronsky proves "fatal," "frowned upon," and "doomed by life itself" (1). According to the myth, passion and death are inseparable companions, and anyone who yields himself up to passion with all his strength will suffer destruction (8). The lovers so yield themselves up to their feelings, and Tolstoy early in the novel foreshadows the death of one of the lovers. A guard falls under a moving train immediately after Anna and Vronsky's first meeting, at the railroad station. Anna exclaims, "It's a bad omen," not knowing the full portent of her prophetic exclamation, that the omen

forecasts her own death and the manner of that death (80). The love will prove fatal for Anna.

Acquaintances, friends, and family frown upon the lawless love of the couple. At a gathering in the home of Vronsky's cousin, "almost everyone . . . glanced a few times at the couple who sat apart from the general circle, as if that disturbed them" (153). After Anna breaks with Karenin and runs away with Vronsky, few friends and family members dare to visit the home of the fallen woman. Further, Anna is ostracized by society. She makes a public appearance at the opera in Petersburg, and Mrs. Kartasov humiliates her before all present. Anna experiences the "sensation of one who . . . [has] been put in the pillory" (549). This abuse is directed, however, at Anna; although his family frowns upon his love for Mrs. Karenin, Vronsky does not suffer the same contempt from society that Anna does.

The societal and family judgment of their love dampens and delays the couple's happiness, as do many other obstacles, not the least of which is a rich, powerful, and still living husband. These conditions, too, are part of the fatal love myth. De Rougemont states that the love must suffer delay "in its fulfillment, by some obstruction" (43). Says he, "The happiness of lovers stirs our [the readers'] feelings only on account of the unhappiness which lies in wait for it [the love]" (43). Anna and Vronsky's intensely passionate love faces "doom by life itself."

Anna suffers for other reasons besides her defiance of the conventions of her society. Life itself dooms hers and Vronsky's relationship and causes her to suffer; the kind of love that the two share cannot last on so intense a level. Anna determines to maintain the intensity of their desires, but such a relationship as theirs cannot stay the same in the midst of day-to-day living and mundane life experiences. The idealized gives way to the petty de-

tails of reality. The doom of their love looms ominous when to these realities are added other harsher ones, such as the cost of Vronsky's love-- Anna pays dearly with her son and her reputation-- and Vronsky's growing boredom and dissatisfaction with Anna. After another in a series of arguments with Vronsky, Anna attempts a reconciliation, using her feminine wiles to draw him back into a close, intimate relationship. Somehow Anna sees in his expression more than enjoyment; he likes "it all," she thinks, but he has "liked it so many times before!" (664)

Despite the way in which Anna and Vronsky's love matches the description of the fatal love myth, Tolstoy actually counters the myth with his ingenious story twists. He accomplishes one twist by the way each member of the triangle views the relationship as a crime, a criminal act. The husband would naturally feel betrayed by his wife's unfaithfulness, but Karenin sees the adulterous relationship in a considerably worse light. He tells Anna, "Our lives have been joined not by man, but by God. Only a crime can break that union, and a crime of that kind brings its own heavy retribution" (159). Karenin speaks in this instance as the voice of Tolstoy, echoing the theme stated in the epigram taken from the Bible: "'Vengeance is mine; I will repay,' saith the Lord. Romans 12:19" (17).

Anna, too, sees the love affair as a crime and herself as a criminal. Early in the relationship, Anna declares, "He[Karenin] knows that were I to run away and abandon my son, I should be behaving like a wicked, infamous woman. He knows that and he knows that I could never bring myself to do it" (301). But, ironically, Anna does abandon her son, and her self-condemnation must echo in her heart constantly. Much later, she cries out between sobs, "Who am I? An immoral woman" (737). Anna views her actions as those which break religious, moral, and societal laws. She uses the expression "my position" obsessively

throughout the novel. Finally, she makes perfectly clear to the reader just what that position is: she is "Vronsky's mistress" (744). Anna comes to a time when she no longer hopes that "her position" will improve. To Dolly she says:

I have no hope and I don't even deserve it . . . I know that in my position I cannot be received by any decent woman. I knew that the very moment I sacrificed everything for him. And this is my reward! Oh, how I hate him!

Anna's passionate love has turned to passionate hate because of her sacrifice, yes, but more because of her guilt.

Vronsky, the third member of the triangle, must experience a personal crisis before he sees his actions as criminal. In the beginning of the relationship, Vronsky gives no thought to Anna's husband; he acknowledges "only his own unquestionable right to love Anna" (119). The young count pursues Anna relentlessly; he "made it the purpose of his life to draw her into an adulterous association at all cost" (141). His pulsating glandular condition changes to true love not with the consummation of their affair, but with Anna's deathbed experience which also precipitates Vronsky's personal crisis. During Anna's illness, Vronsky sees "into her very soul" (421). His love for her grows with that insight until "it seemed . . . that he had never loved her before" and now he loves her "as she should be loved" (421). But Vronsky also sees Tolstoy's realities: Anna's true feelings of remorse and guilt, the exalted position of the husband who stands in God's stead as spiritual leader of his family, and himself as intruder, interloper into a place where he does not belong. This vision brings to the surface, from deep within, Vronsky's "strange, revulsion" whose target has been unnamed heretofore, Vronsky himself. Vronsky's vision and its result closely parallel those of Isaiah the prophet, with notable exceptions.

Isaiah's vision is metaphysical; he sees the exalted God, sees himself as a "man of unclean lips," then turns toward others with goodness and in righteousness.³ Vronsky's vision is physical and emotional; he sees the exalted husband, sees himself as "despicable and mean," then turns on himself with violence. But Vronsky does not die from his self-inflicted wound, nor is he able to kill the damnable self-judgmental feelings in his breast. He lives on, conscious of his guilt.

Tolstoy accomplishes a second twist by showing the effects of passionate love on the lovers. The myth states that the love "afflicts, yet elevates" (De Rougemont 2). Neither Vronsky nor Anna attain any elevating or ennobling transfigurations. Both become quite selfish and rather cold. Tolstoy reveals Anna's attitude: "Now nothing mattered to her anymore . . . She wanted only one thing--to punish him" (743). Vronsky's attitude is hardly much nobler: "I am quite willing to give her everything except my independence" (emphasis added) (642). By this time, their relationship has deteriorated to the degree that each thinks "the other wrong, and at every opportunity," they try to "prove it to one another" (731).

A third twist of Tolstoy's that counters the fatal love myth relates to Anna's death. Her death would seem to classify hers and Vronsky's love affair as an example of the glorified and perpetuated fatal love myth, but Anna's death has the opposite effect. Her vengeful act of suicide renders the death and the love affair unattractive and unromantic. Tolstoy manipulates the effect through Vronsky's reaction following his last look at Anna. He sees, frozen on her dead face, an expression which seems to repeat the terrible phrase, "You--you will be sorry for this" (745). That expression robs him of pleasant memories:

He tried to remember her as she was when
he met her for the first time, also at a

railway station, mysterious, charming loving, seeking, and bestowing happiness, and not cruel and vindictive as he remembered her at the last. He tried to recall his best moments with her; but those moments were poisoned forever. He remembered her only in her triumph, after having carried out her threat of inflicting on him a totally useless but ineradicable remorse. (772)

The "heavy retribution," prophesied by Karenin, falls and is accomplished ironically, by one of the guilty lovers in a spiteful act of vengeance.

In De Rougemont's discussion of the fatal-love myth, he examines the possibility that "something fatal to marriage" exists "at the very heart of human longing" (4). In the hands of Tolstoy, the myth, the grand and glorious passion, becomes sordid, seamy, and the destroyer of noble values, the transgressor of sacred principles. Despite Tolstoy's ability to separate the crime from the criminal, he portrays passionate adulterous love as the ugly enemy of marriage and family life. His portrait of the fatal love myth de-glorifies the myth and defuses the power of the myth to perpetuate itself.

by AMY PATTERSON

NOTES

¹Lawrence Kasdan, Body Heat, dir. Kasdan, Warner Brothers, 1982.

²The list of lovers and names of contributors to the development of the passionate love myth are taken from D. D. Owen, Noble Lovers (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

³Isaiah's vision is recorded in Isaiah 6:1-8.

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